

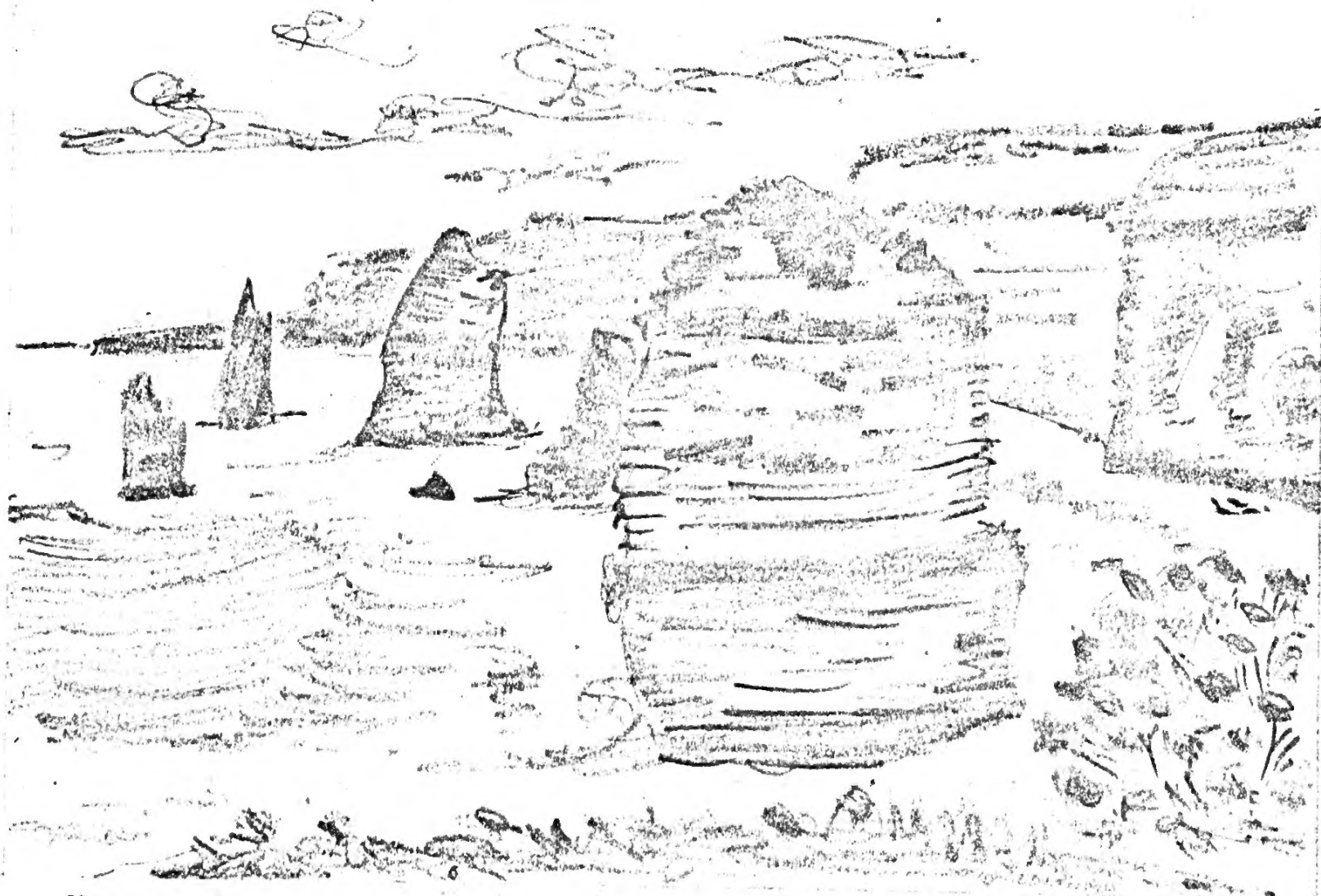
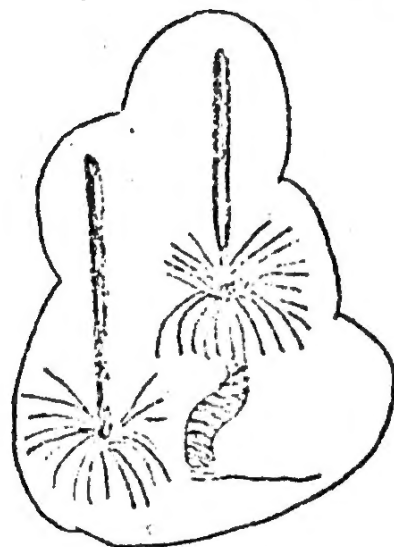
CASTLEMAINE NATURALIST

MAY 1985

Vol 10

#4

101



Victorian Coastline near Princetown

Our Centrefold: This is a map of the district divided into smaller areas for the purpose of making more accurate bird lists. Sightings can be related to more specific areas than hitherto. The scale does not allow some small special areas to be shown, such as the City area and the Settling Ponds. These will be included on a later map. We would like to have your comments on the likely usefulness of this map.

The Month at Campbells Creek

BY Terry Collins

BIRDS, BIRDS, and BIRDS.-- a never ending shuttle from the timber to our bird baths, due of course to the long dry spell.

Noted visitors were Yellow-tufted and White-naped Honeyeaters. Our first Scarlet Robin appeared on April 12 and our cheeky Grey Thrush is back, hopefully to stay through the winter. Numerous Blue Wrens around all day but only immature males with the colony. Not one sighting of a New Holland Honeyeater for 20 months. Previously they had stayed around for stretch of 16 months but that was through the drought year. A total of 28 varieties in the bird life were evident for the month around our block. The Cotoneasters supply the Rosellas with all the berries they need but the prime delicacy seemed to be the berries of a Crataegus.

Plant-wise very little to report. Some flowers on a small Grevillea thelemanniana and a few on a Hakea suaveolens, but this bush suffered in the "big frost", losing all its top growth. A Banksia collina has plenty of candles nearing maturity which should prove popular to the Spinebills. Another query, this time Dusky Woodswallows. Fourteen years ago in April a small colony of about eight lived up behind our shed. At night they clustered together on the top wire of a fence. A very dangerous situation I thought. However they have not been sighted since. Do they visit any homes of our members? Let's know, and don't forget about the skylarks.

Notes from the Committee

*We have re-affiliated with WVFNCA - cost \$10

*The patch of rare Swainson's pea along the railway line at Castlemaine North has been bulldozed. We should let all appropriate authorities know of significant areas, and ask that they be protected.

*The Ballarat FNC is planning a campout to Melville Caves. We have altered our excursion date to this area so that we can share in their campout.

*WVFNCA celebrates its 25 birthday this year. We have been asked to have a 30x30cm banner as part of the celebrations.

*Bendigo FNC has its 40th anniversary this year.

*Conservation Council of Victoria plans to prepare a "log of claims". The committee has suggested items for inclusion. Give your ideas to a committee member.

*A computer bird list for the Castlemaine district is planned. We need first of all decide on the areas to be included. Ideas to E. Perkins please.

Kangaroobie is a resource farm situated at the mouth of the Gellibrand River at Princetown on the South-west coast of Victoria. This was the setting for a most interesting campout recently. The members of the host club, Timboon proved most hospitable, providing suppers and morning tea, while the meals provided by the management of Kangaroobie were more than adequate. Members were accommodated in recently built dormitories containing approx 8 bunk style beds, hot water was plentiful, the large dining-recreation area was warmed by a large open fire burning in a central conversation pit, and the atmosphere was decidedly pleasant.

On the Friday evening, earlier arrivals were treated to slides of the S-W region, while later arrivals were treated to supper before bed.

Many were up and out early on Saturday exploring the vicinity but for a time the weather looked threatening. However the clouds cleared away to allow a pleasant day to be spent exploring the coast from the Bay of Islands in the West to the Twelve Apostles in the East. Lunch was provided Port Campbell where a visit was made to the Park HQ where a fascinating Audio-visual was shown depicting the Park and some its history, in particular the shipwrecks which were all too frequent on that coast in the days of sail. This was complemented by a visit to the Port Campbell museum where many mementoes of earlier days, including relics salvaged from the wrecks by skindivers in recent years are on display.

PRINCETON SWAMP

One of the highlights of the campout at Princeton was the birdwatching on the Princeton Swamp. This is the list seen by a group of club members. Their comment about the list was "that we only had a couple of hours, and didn't really get to the swamp!

White-faced Heron

Large Egret

Straw-neck Ibis

Yellow-billed Spoonbill

Raven

Spur-winged Plover

White-fronted Chat

Welcome Swallow

Kookaburra

Supberb Blue-wren

Red-browed Firetail-finches

Grey Shrike-thrush

Restless Flycatcher

Crimson Rosella

White-necked Heron

Cattle Egret

Chestnut-breasted Shelduck

Eastern Swamp-hen (hundreds)

White-backed Magpie

Black Swan

Richards Pipit

Coot

Southern Yellow-robin

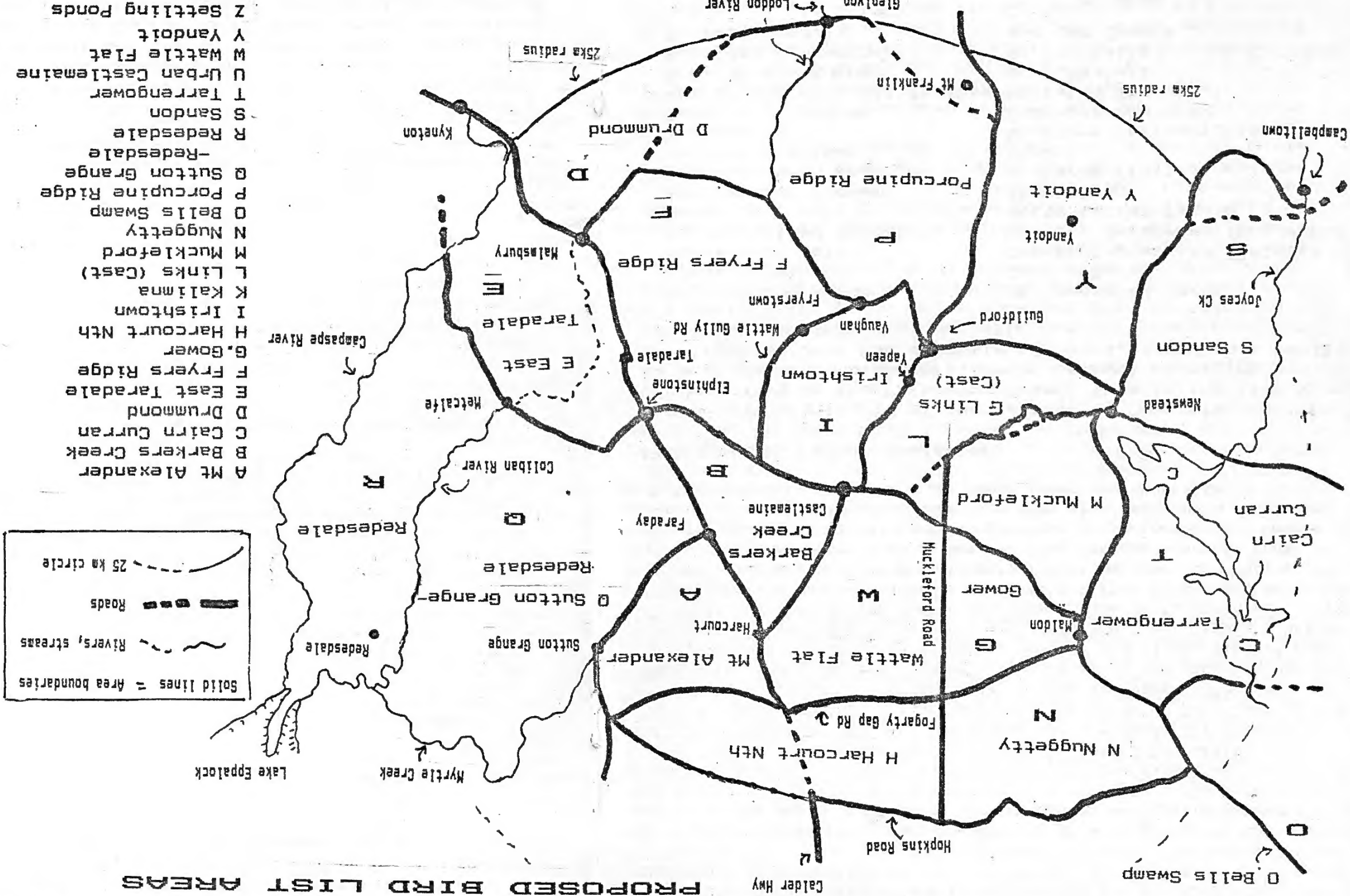
Southern Emu-wren

Striated Thornbill

Grey Fantail

Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo
and two Camels

PROPOSED BIRD LIST AREAS



If you are in the area, a visit to the swamp is well worthwhile. Turn south off the Ocean Road at Princeton, to drive a few hundred metres along the old ocean road.

Other groups saw several Brown Bitterns in the early morning.

Other birds seen during the weekend included Bristle Birds and Singing Honeyeaters.

MELBA GULLY BY NIGHT

by The Ed.

"Put out the torches".

As the command was passed back from the head of the line, the faint pools of light illuminating our feet were extinguished and we were left in the velvet blackness of the rainforest on a moonless night. In the reflected light of the torches it had been possible to make out fronds of vegetation on either side of the path, with many a Treefern frond dripping water from overhead as we passed beneath. Some of the sprays of leaves were the fine, fernlike unmistakable leaves of the myrtle Beech, which also formed most of the carpet of leaves which covered the surface of the muddy path. To the right of the path, the ground fell away into blackness from which rose the sound of a swiftly-rushing stream falling over rocks as it tumbled down its bed.

As darkness descended upon us, we were suddenly very aware that the surroundings were not completely black in every direction. There set in the bank at the side of the path where it was cut into the side of the hill were tiny jewels glowing in the darkness. The light was quite distinct but yet insufficient to illuminate any of the surroundings, so that in a sense the lights almost seemed to be floating in the darkness without any support. We had been warned not to shine torches too close to them as they are very susceptible to heat, but in the faint light of a torch focussed in the vicinity of a light, it was just possible to distinguish a minute chain of threads, resembling tiny beads which hung down from each point of light.

We had arrived at Melba Gully at 8 p.m. after a drive of about 45 min along a windy mountain road through the Otways, from our base camp near Princetown. It was comforting to note that this was a school bus route and that our driver obviously knew his stuff, as at one moment the bus would be struggling up a steep pinch and the next moment would be racing down downwards and around bends with the thick undergrowth forming a tunnel ahead outlined in the headlights. On arrival at Melba Gully we formed into a crocodile and moved off down the fairly steep track which led into the rainforest. As we descended into the forest it seemed to become wetter and wetter as if it had recently been raining as perhaps it had. Small streams gurgled from the hillside above us

7

and found their way under a number of wooden bridges along the path, while below the path, somewhere down there in the blackness, the louder roar indicated the presence of the Joanna River. There were a number of torches among the party, but the light was needed to light up the pathway, so that one was only vaguely aware of the thick foliage around and above the path. The rainfall here is one of the highest in Victoria and supports a dense growth of Myrtle Beech, Blackwood and Tree Ferns, with Mountain Ash and Messmate on the higher slopes. The ground and the trunks and branches of the older trees were miniature jungles of mosses and filmy ferns growing right up towards the light.

But tonight it was the glow-worms we had come to see and they did not let us down. Little spots of bluish, cold light were set all over the banks beside the path, in one place reaching up well over head height. These "worms" are actually the larval form of a type of small fly, which use the light and the sticky hanging threads to lure and capture prey. An enchanting sight nevertheless and one which captivated the party of Western Victorian Field Nats, and made that night of the campout a memorable one for many people. It was a satisfied crew which eventually made its way back to the base camp for a welcome supper before bed.

The next day my wife and I decided that we would have to call in there again on the way home in order to see what it was like in the daylight. This time it was not so deserted as several family parties were enjoying the picnic facilities provided by the National Parks Service. Down in the gully it was cool and green and the full extent of the lush vegetation could be fully appreciated. What a delightful spot it must be on a hot day. Treeferns are always delightful, but the greatest fascination lay in the venerable Myrtle Beeches which are in abundance. Unlike a Eucalypt which carries its foliage miles out of reach, the Beeches seem to sprout new leaves and branches at all levels so one could appreciate the attractive foliage at close range instead of having to use binoculars. Each Beech carried its own micro-population of small ferns and mosses of a multitude of types, all the way up the trunk and onto the branches. So too for that matter did the Blackwoods which were also abundant. One particularly fascinating specimen was an elderly Mountain Ash which had an enormous girth at its base. Unfortunately fires and storms had reduced the top, or perhaps fortunately, as it is perhaps more likely that the remaining section will be able continue standing for some time yet.

Melba Gully is just off the Ocean Road near Lavers Hill and is well worth a visit if you happen to be in the vicinity. It has been under the management of the National Parks Service since 1975.

Terry has produced some back numbers of the N.L. if anyone wants them. They are # 29,31,39,42,62

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. AGENDA

sitors are invited to attend the club's sessions.
Excursions leave promptly at the times shown.

IN1:Friday 10 May. DEVIL'S KITCHEN, By W. Day, Ballarat
C.A.E. High School at 8 p.m.

Sat 11 May DEVIL'S KITCHEN, via Ballarat Leave 10 a.m.
from SEC, Mostyn St.

Fri 7 June STELLA BEDGGOOD MEMORIAL LECTURE -School of
Mines Court House, Lydiard St, Ballarat at 8pm.
Subj:Natural History Photography of the late Stella
Bedgegood.

Frid 14 June. MR ALLAN HARTUP will be guest speaker.

Sat 15 June. MELBOURNE ZOO All day bus trip. Fare \$7-8,
depending on numbers. \$5dep to K. Turner. Leave Lyttleton
st (opp Uniting Church) at 9.00,leave zoo at 3.30 approx.
Visitors welcomed.

Fri 12 July DR E. PETERS - POND LIFE

Sat 13 July NUGGETTY RANGES. 1.30 p.m rom SEC, Mostyn
Street

Aug 30-31,Sept 1st. AXEDALE -W.V.F.N.C.A campout.

Fri 13 Sept tba

Sept 13-15 MELVILLE CAVES Campout arranged by Ballarat
F.N.C.

Fri/Sat/Sun 11-13 October? COLAC - W.V.F.N.C.A. Campout.

Sun 20 Oct. BENDIGO WHIPSTICK - all day excursion with
Maryborough F.N.C.

Sat 9 Nov. Excursion with Bird Observers Club.

Feb 1986. BENDIGO SETTLING PONDS with Maryborough F.N.C.

.....